

Implement the “Right Time” Training

The impact of training on increasing placement stability is well documented (Chamberlain, 2006, pp.409-424). The promising practice of “Right Time” training extends this area of practice knowledge into adoption. Since over half of the children in custody are adopted by their foster parents (53 percent in FY10), it is critical that training provided from pre-placement to post permanency provides the information necessary to strengthen relationships and address the needs of children. Recent findings indicate that adoptive families are best positioned for success when they are fully supported with services that are “trauma-informed, attachment-based, highly individualized, and able to meet each family where it is” (Yates and Kulesz, 2013).

States utilize various methods to ensure that foster/adoptive families obtain the information and support that they need. However, most of these methods are not comprehensive and do not build on specific needs of families and children. A comprehensive model would offer impactful training, information, and support that encourage foster/adoptive families to customize a training package that addresses their “need to know” and adapts to their schedules. This type of model would include web-based professional and peer guides, models for support groups, and other types of instructional resources.

Applying the principle of “Right Time” training limits the information covered during pre-service training to only what the caregiver needs to know prior to placement occurring. This is particularly necessary given that there are frequently significant time lapses between pre-placement training and placement. Interviews with numerous pre-adoptive parents conducted in the Midwest in 2014 revealed a common theme regarding pre placement training. The adoptive parents consistently stated that pre-placement training was too long and difficult to retain all of the information, especially without the context to apply it. For example, families need to know that the child welfare system expects that foster families will engage with birth families and may be called upon to supervise visits, but they do not need to know the protocol for supervising visits

and reporting to the case manager until it is time for visitation to begin. “Right Time” practice changes how pre-placement training is offered so that pre-adoptive parents receive critical information that is more proximal to their experiences. The result is that “Right Time” training offers fewer pre-placement training sessions and increases the amount of training offered after placement. With this model, more child-specific training that address common themes with different situations (starting school, holidays, and vacations) would be offered. These trainings would begin within 30 to 60 days after placement and continue to be available throughout the adoptive/guardianship process.

“Right Time” Practices

- **Traditional in-person training sessions:** Sessions are designed for accessibility. Frequently requested trainings should be offered several times a year. Training is best delivered in cohorts of foster/adoptive families that are preparing to experience a similar next-process step. Almost all families who are adopting their first child will need help understanding the court process, how to prepare for case-work visits, record keeping, and clinical information such as trauma and its impact and manifestations, and the rules of engagement relative to a child’s family of origin. Note that addressing specific developmental and behavioral needs of children are not included, as they are best taught in small, more homogenous groups.
- **E-trainings:** Trainings sessions can take the form of interactive and pre-recorded online courses and webinars. Many states now offer topical training or encourage (pay fee and count as part of the training requirement) foster/adoptive families to access the multitude of high-quality trainings, courses, and webinars available over the internet. These online trainings are beneficial because they provide families with instant information that can be accessed based on their availability. Child welfare agencies can enhance



these trainings by developing “tip sheets” that describe services/resources specific to their state. Providing families with immediate access to information, guidance, and resources helps them to feel supported. Several states provide comprehensive training lists. And, many states have pre-recorded webinars and training modules that do not require any registration and are accessible without a login. Here are some examples of this training:

- Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System offers an interactive, brief pre-placement training completely online: <http://wcpds.wisc.edu/foster-parent-training/Default.aspx>
- Washington State Department of Social and Health Services provides a comprehensive set of links to free training: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/onGoingVid.asp>
- Adoption Learning Partners offer webinars for an average of \$15 per topic: <http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/catalog/webinars/index.cfm>
- Foster Parent College offers courses at the cost of about \$5 per hour: <http://www.fosterparentcollege.com/>
- **Post-placement “small group” sessions:** Small group sessions are professionally or peer facilitated and can take place in person or through telecommunication. Small groups involve building a cohort of foster/adoptive families with a shared interest around a specific topic, for example, “parenting youth with autism,” or “engaging incarcerated birth family members.” The groups form based upon a number of foster/adoptive parents expressing an interest on discussing a similar topic. This provides an opportunity for foster families to access information at the “Right Time” (when they need it). The group process may vary. Some may meet for a few weeks and others may go on for years. Small groups could be peer-led parents who have or are successfully navigating the subject area, with the aid of child welfare professionals or experts in the topic area that will be discussed. Some groups are free flowing; others have professionally driven content shared each meeting. A very effective practice is to combine a small group with the e-training format described above, or e-library format described below. This ensures consistency in the factual information being shared but allows the group to share its personal experiences as well. In some areas, groups meet together in person; these may be site-based and often include extra supports

such as food and child care. The emerging trend is the e-meeting which requires only a telephone and a pass-code, and allows staff to track participation. These can involve people from all across the county that are navigating similar steps in their parenting journey. Not recommended are blogs, (unless the state dedicates the resource to ensure that it is monitored for appropriate content, that personal information is routinely redacted, and that the information shared represents accepted practice).

Some examples of post-placement small groups include:

- Iowa Foster & Parent Adoptive Parents Association: http://www.ifapa.org/training/support_group_trainings.asp
- National American Council on Adoptable Children: <http://www.nacac.org/parentgroups/parentgroups.html>

Utah Division of Child and Family Service’s policies (<http://hspolicy.utah.gov/files/dcf/DCFS%20Practice%20Guidelines/400-%20Adoption.pdf>). Beginning at page 37, this site provides one of the best examples of multiple components of post-adoptive support. Their approach is to provide “psycho-educational parent groups led by professional post-adoption workers and co-led by peer parents within 30 days of family’s adoptive placement (or 90 days of first placement for foster-to-adopt families).” The practice recognizes the significance of providing information on managing trauma-response behaviors and develops relationships with post-adoption workers and post-adoptive families. These interventions provide families with immediate support and the ability to apply skills that are being taught.

- **On-call resources:** On-call resources, staffed by peers or professionals, can provide immediate support during a developing challenge or crisis. In researching this piece, adoption staff reported that foster/adoptive families always had access to training that was needed. All they had to do was to reach out to the adoption worker and they would be matched to a support. However, foster/adoptive families did not view this availability in the same light. As one adoptive parent stated, “What adoption worker is at their desk at 2 a.m.? In fact, what adoption worker is at their desk?” This variance in opinion is indicated not because staff lack the information, but because staff are frequently inaccessible at the exact time when foster/adoptive parents experience the need for support. On-call resources work similar to an abuse/neglect hotline or a Tele-med service. It requires one well-informed, empathic worker or peer supporter to be available by phone and to offer the support needed to

calm foster/adoptive families, guide intervention, offer referrals or web-based resources, or help families contact a wrap-around/urgent/mobile resource if necessary. Some example of on-call resources are as follows:

- Missouri Foster & Adoption Resource Center 24/7 on-call (FamilyWorks):
<http://www.foster-adopt.org/for-current-parents/support-services/>
- Tennessee Adoption Support and Preservation:
<http://www.tnasap.org/>

Adoptive mentors: Mentors can provide family-to-family support in navigating the foster-to-adoption process or post-adoption resources. Mentors are usually trained through a state adoption agency and may/may not be compensated for providing phone-based support to other foster/adoptive families. There are also informal mentors. In both cases, mentors provide foster/adoptive parents with information and insight in a manner that allows them to directly apply skills being taught.”

- National American Council on Adoptable Children, *Developing a Parent-to-Parent Support Network*: <http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/parent2parentnetwork.pdf>
- Adoption Support for Kentucky:
<http://www.uky.edu/TRC/sites/www.uky.edu/TRC/files/Adoption%20Support%20brochure%20May%202013%20FINAL.pdf>

- **E-Libraries, lending libraries, book lists, newsletters, etc.:** These have become popular methods of delivering “Right Time” training/information for foster/adoptive families. In almost all states, a portion of the training requirement may be accomplished through “self-study” using approved or recommended readings. Examples include:

- Adoptive & Foster Families of Maine:
<http://www.affm.net/Services/LendingLibrary.aspx>
- Illinois Department of Child and Family Services newsletter: http://www.state.il.us/dcfs/NewsLetters/com_communications_families.shtml

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*National Resource Center for Adoption Permanency Support and Preservation Model, 2014.
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